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Aidid ambush blamed for deadly battle

More than 100 die as U.S. gunships open fire

MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — The American officer who led a helicopter assault on Somali militiamen after they ambushed a U.N. convoy said today he knew there were women among the fighters when his gunships opened fire.

Supporters of fugitive warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid said at least 125 people, including women and children, were killed by machine gun and 20mm cannon fire from the U.S. helicopters Thursday.

Aidid's fighters were blamed for the ambush. One Pakistani was killed and two Americans and two other Pakistanis were wounded.

Col. Mike Dallas, commander of the U.S. Quick Reaction Force, said he could not provide an estimate of Somali casualties because "the situation was very fluid, very violent, very difficult."

Dallas told reporters he flew over the scene in a Blackhawk helicopter shortly after the ambush began and saw about 200 Somalis firing on the U.N. convoy.

HE SAID THEY were hidden behind a 600-foot stretch of wall and in nearby buildings and had the convoy pinned down with machine guns, grenades, recoilless rifles and small arms.

"I did see women with that group of people engaging those forces," Dallas said. "I do not know how many. I did not see children. I saw women."

The battle was one of the most severe in the nearly nine-month international military mission in Somalia and is sure to raise the hostility of many Somalis toward the foreign troops.

The Somali casualty toll could not be independently confirmed, but area residents told reporters that bodies littered the streets after the fierce fighting, which lasted more than an hour.

Maj. David Stockwell, spokesman for the U.N. military command, today called the ambush by Aidid's forces "deliberate, large scale and brutal."

He earlier said some women and children were armed with hand grenades and small arms.

"In an ambush, there are no sidelines, no bleacher seats," he said. "Everyone on the ground at that point was a combatant as far as we were concerned."

STOCKWELL CALLED THE ambush "probably the most significant" since early June.

Twenty-four Pakistanis died in a series of ambushes on June 5, the first major attack on U.N. peacekeepers since they took over the humanitarian mission in Somalia in May from a U.S.-led coalition.

Aidid has been blamed by the United Nations for that attack and scores of others that have killed 48 peacekeepers and wounded more than 175. The dead include four Americans.

The battle Thursday added to growing concerns among American lawmakers about U.S. involvement in Somalia, which began in December to ensure the delivery of food to the starving in a nation wracked by famine, civil war and anarchy. More than 350,000 Somalis died of hunger and disease last year.

The Senate voted 90-7 late Thursday to pass a non-binding resolution saying the president should by Nov. 15 ask for congressional approval for the deployment of U.S. forces in Somalia.

In Brief

Marcos buried in Philippines

BATAC, Philippines (AP) — Four years after his death in exile, Ferdinand Marcos was buried in a glass coffin today amid thousands of admirers who blame his ouster on a U.S.-led conspiracy.

Following a Mass, his widow, Imelda, famed for her 1,200 pairs of shoes, removed her golden footwear and walked barefoot into the stone mausoleum, where the coffin was placed on a black pedestal near an eternal flame.

The body is clad in a white, native Barong long-sleeved shirt, black trousers and a rainbow-colored chest sash bearing medals from World War II. Marcos' head rests on a white pillow.

Marcos was ousted in the 1986 "people power revolution" and banished to Hawaii, where he died on Sept. 28, 1989. His successor Corazon Aquino refused burial here. But her successor Fidel Ramos, a Marcos cousin, permitted burial in Marcos' home province Ilocos Norte, where he is still revered.

Ramos did not attend and refused state honors befitting a former president.

Wholesale prices make big plunge

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prices at the wholesale level plunged 0.6 percent in August, the biggest decline in 2 1/2 years, led by a record drop in the cost of tobacco products, the government reported today.

The Labor Department said its Producer Price Index, which measures inflationary pressures before they reach consumers, dropped for the fourth straight month, the first time that has happened since 1986.

Much of the good news in August stemmed from a 25.6 percent plunge in tobacco prices, the biggest drop on record, beating the old mark of an 8.6 percent decline in January 1983.

Name-brand tobacco manufacturers had announced two months ago that they would be rolling back some of their earlier price increases because of rising competition from generic products.

Vietnam documents may help find fliers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vietnam has turned over to the U.S. government six previously unknown documents that may contain important clues to the fate of American aviators missing from the Vietnam War, Defense Department officials said today.

Defense Secretary Les Aspin said in a speech at the Pentagon that the documents, which he did not describe in any detail, "could make possible further casualty resolution" dealing with U.S. losses along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the supply route where many American pilots were lost during the war.

Demo chief: 'God is an independent'

Wilhelm tells Christian group not to use faith as a weapon

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic Party chairman today bluntly rebuked the Christian Coalition for attacking President Clinton's budget and said while faith is vital in politics, it should not be used "as a weapon" to divide Americans over abortion and homosexuality.

In a speech to the Pat Robertson-led organization, David Wilhelm said individuals with strong religious conviction were welcome in the Democratic fold. But, in an implicit criticism of the Christian Coalition and some conservative Republicans, Wilhelm said Democrats do not use faith to demand allegiance to certain views.

"No party has a corner on the allegiance of the community of believers," Wilhelm said. "However inconvenient it might be, God is an independent."

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY chairman was the opening speaker at the Christian Coalition's annual "Road to Victory" conference, a gathering of about 2,000 conservative Christian activists whose agenda is dominated by Republicans.

Wilhelm used that angle to open with a joke, saying he was the only speaker "not running for the Republican nomination for president in 1996."

The bulk of his speech, however, mixed praise for the deep religious values held by the coalition's members with sharp criticisms of how Wilhelm said the Coalition has used that faith to imply that those who disagree with it are somehow unchristian.

"Only God possesses absolute truth," Wilhelm said. "None of us may declare other points of view an invalid or irreligious. From the depths of our conviction we must always remember the guideline 'Judge not lest ye be judged.' And let us say that while religious motivation is appropriate, it is wrong to use religious authority to coerce support in the public arena."

As an example, Wilhelm criticized Christian Coalition radio ads aired during the budget debate, criticizing members of Congress who backed President Clinton's plan. One target was Democratic Rep. Ted Strickland of Ohio, an ordained Methodist minister.

"He cast his vote according to the dictates of his conscience," Wilhelm said. "And he doesn't deserve to be targeted with mean-spirited, misleading commercials by this group or any other purporting to speak for religious Americans."

RALPH REED, THE Coalition's executive director, told the group shortly before Wilhelm spoke that "We are not saying that those who disagree with us on some of these issues that we care about are not Christian. We respect their profession of faith; we simply think they are wrong on the issues."

Settlement in implant suit aired

Each victim could get up to $2 million

DETROIT (AP) — Dow Corning Corp. is proposing the creation of a $4.75 billion fund to compensate thousands of women with silicone gel breast implants.

Women would be eligible for up to $2 million each under the proposed class-action settlement, announced Thursday by Dow Corning, once the largest maker of the implants.

Manufacturers, suppliers, doctors and insurance companies would pay into the fund, which would compensate women for illnesses blamed on implants and pay for surgery for those who want to have them removed.

THE SETTLEMENT — which is subject to approval by manufacturers, plaintiffs' lawyers and U.S. District Judge Sam Pointer, who is overseeing 27 class-action lawsuits in Alabama — could end most of the approximately 8,000 lawsuits filed over the implants in recent years.

Women could collect for such illnesses as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis without having to prove that the implants actually caused their injuries. Dow Corning has consistently denied any link between breast implants and disease.

"ONE OF THE most advantageous features of the proposed settlement is that it will provide women who develop these diseases in the future or, whose diseases worsen over time, with the opportunity to recover for their injuries over the course of 30 years," said Stan Chesley, a plaintiffs' lawyer who has negotiated with implant makers and others over the last 10 months.

Women dissatisfied with their compensation could opt out of the settlement and pursue individual legal action, Chesley said.

Dow Corning executive vice president Gary Anderson, whose Midland-based company is named in 6,800 lawsuits, would not say how much it expects to contribute. Dow Corning stopped making the implants last year.

Only possible conclusion: murder

Mother admits she killed her 3 infants

By BRENDA C. COLEMAN
Of The Associated Press

WAUKEGAN, Ill. — They brainstormed. They pored over medical records. They tested the water and the air. They consulted the nation's top safety experts, disease experts and experts in sudden infant death syndrome.

Finally, they ruled out everything but murder.

And then on Wednesday, investigators said, 30-year-old Gail Savage admitted she had suffocated each of her three infant children with a blanket while her husband was at work. She was jailed without bail on three counts of murder.

"I don't think you could ever come up with a motive for three crimes of this nature," State's Attorney Michael J. Waller said Thursday.

Savage's lawyer, Robert Hauser, said the woman's mental condition would almost certainly be central to the case.

Savage and her husband, James Savage, 36, of Wauconda, had said they believed their children died of SIDS or a genetic defect.

But Coroner Barbara Richardson said two SIDS cases in one household are extremely rare. It has happened only once in 17 years in Lake County, she said. So the third death in less than three years, on June 28, raised suspicions.

"We proceeded with some discretion," Waller said. "Obviously, you don't want to be accusing people whose children die under these circumstances until you can ... rule out all other causes of death.

"And that's really what this investigation has done, and it's gone to great lengths."

The coroner and her staffers and those in other agencies brainstormed on three occasions, trying to identify all possible explanations for the third death.

They reviewed the babies' and parents' medical records, had water in the home tested, asked the Consumer Product Safety Commission to rule out crib dangers and consulted the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Also, they tested emissions from the family's vehicles. They contacted the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation to make sure an instance of the condition in the father's family would have had no effect. And they talked with the Epilepsy Foundation to rule out a connection with the mother's reported epilepsy.

They also consulted four of the top SIDS experts in the country and had Baylor University perform extensive tests to rule out poisons.

Every possibility was eliminated.

Finally, they decided to interrogate the parents separately, rather than together.

"That's when the case took a different turn," the coroner said. The father is not a suspect, Waller said.

Autopsies had showed no injuries or other problems in the babies' development, the coroner said, and the conditions of their lungs were consistent with those of SIDS victims.

But "no forensic pathologist in the world" can tell the difference between suffocation with a pillow or blanket and SIDS, Richardson said.

Second suspect arrested in murder of tourist

MIAMI (AP) — The 19-year-old woman accused of killing a German tourist in a failed robbery attempt was arrested today after two days on the run, police said.

"We have Patsy Jones in custody. We just arrested her," said police spokesman Angelo Bitsis.

Police had been seeking Jones in the killing early Wednesday of Uwe-Wilhelm Rakebrand with a sawed-off rifle. Charges were not immediately released.

Police announced Thursday they had arrested Jones but admitted minutes later they had the wrong woman.

Her boyfriend, Recondall Wiggins, 19, turned himself in on the day of the killing and admitted driving the van used in the attack. He was charged with first-degree murder and attempted robbery.

Soon after the attack, Wiggins and Jones walked into the police station where his mother works and admitted he was to blame, a newspaper reported today.

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